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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the use by school psychologists of procedures for nondiscriminatory assessment of handicapped students. Ss were surveyed via the School Psychologists' Use of Nondiscriminatory Assessment (SPUN). Results indicated that Ss never used most of the techniques during evaluation described in SPUN. Further, Ss indicated they they were frequently involved in educational programing for handicapped minority students, except for outlining classroom activities emphasizing cultural diversity and identifying educational materials depicting multicultural themes. Findings suggested that school psychologists undergo extensive preservice and inservice training on administering and perhaps also developing techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment. It was also recommended that educators identify educational materials related to racial and ethnic themes. (Author/CL)

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# *School Psychologists' Use of Nondiscriminatory Assessment: Implications for Educating Handicapped Minority Students

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## Abstract

This research determined the extent of school psychologists' use of certain procedures for nondiscriminatory assessment. The results indicated that the participants never used most of the techniques during evaluation that were described in the questionnaire, School Psychologists' Use of Nondiscriminatory Assessment (SPUN). In addition, the participants indicated that they were frequently involved in educational programming for handicapped minority students, with the exceptions of outlining classroom activities which emphasize cultural diversity and identifying educational materials which depict multicultural themes. Based on the results it was recommended that school psychologists' undergo extensive preservice and inservice training on how to administer and, perhaps, develop techniques which lead to nondiscriminatory assessment. Further it was recommended that educators identify educational materials that relate to racial and ethnic themes.

# School Psychologists' Use of Nondiscriminatory Assessment: Implications for Educating Handicapped Minority Students

## Introduction

The use of standardized tests to identify and place handicapped children from various racial and cultural backgrounds has been met with much criticism over the past decade. Critics charged that tests were discriminatory because they reflected only middle-class values and attitudes and did not depict the linguistic and cultural experiences of students from minority groups, especially blacks and Hispanics (Tucker, 1980). Tests further restricted educational and vocational opportunities, lead to stereotyped educational practices, and helped maintain prejudicial attitudes (Oakland, 1973; Laosa & Oakland, 1974). Another result of the use of tests was the identification of handicapped students from minority groups in numbers disproportionate to the racial composition of society as a whole, which lead to disproportionate numbers in special education classrooms (Mercer, 1973).

Charges of racial bias leveled specifically at the assessment process and the assessors were followed by resolutions from the Association of Black Psychologists, and other professional organizations, calling for a moratorium on the use of tests with monority group children. The judicial system became involved to determine the extent childrens' rights were being violated. Findings from Diana v. California State Board of Education (1969) and, more recently, Larry P. v. Riles (1979) confirmed the existence of discriminatory practices. These findings were affirmed in Public Law 94-142, which, among other guidelines for evaluation, requires the establishment of procedures for the selection and use of tests that are not racially or culturally discriminatory.

Duffey, Salvia, Tucker, and Ysseldyke (1981) described discriminatory assessment as constant error in decisions, predictions, and inferences about members of particular groups. Historically, strategies employed to eliminate discrimina-

tory assessment included attempts to minimize the cultural and verbal components of testing: so-called culture free and culture fair testing (Cattel, 1950; Davis & Eells, 1953). More recently, other strategies have been developed that are potentially nondiscriminatory. Culture specific tests, such as the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity (BITCH) (Williams, 1972), were developed for a specific racial group having a common, identifiable geographic region. Criterion-referenced measures also were described as an answer. These tests assessed specific educational goals and were suggested to be more relevant to educational intervention (Drew, 1973; Brady, Manni, & Winikur, 1983). De Avila and Havassy (1975) proposed the use of tests based on Piaget's stages of cognitive development. They contended that these tests were more likely to determine fairly the abilities of children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Feuerstein (1979), among others, proposed assessing an individuals learning potential rather than current abilities, a factor measured by traditional intelligence tests. Feuerstein concluded that this learning potential assessment device (LPAD) is a fairer means of assessment, since it might reduce the effects of cultural disadvantage.

One of the newer approaches to nondiscriminatory assessment has been the use of pluralistic norms, such as the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) (Mercer & Lewis, 1978). Used with existing tests, pluralistic norms are usually standardized on blacks, Hispanics, and other racial and cultural groups. Translating existing tests into other languages (Alzate, 1978), altering test administration procedures (i.e., Harber, 1982), and training children to take tests (Oakland, 1972) have been suggested as procedures which improve performance on standardized tests. Proponents of these approaches contend that minority group childrens' scores are more accurate and testing is less discriminatory (Bailey & Harbin, 1980).

While much criticism has been leveled at the discriminatory aspects of testing, referral and placement also have the potential for bias. During referral teachers may refer as academic problems those children who have not been the lowest academically in the class but those whose behavior they find disturbing, from families that speak a foreign language, or who exhibit other characteristics (i.e., dress poorly) (Tobias, Zirbin, & Bodlakova, 1982). During placement many minority group children have been routinely placed in classrooms for the educable mentally retarded. Given the strong evidence that such classes were often ineffective (Dunn, 1968), assignment often constituted evidence of discriminatory practices (Oakland, 1980).

School psychologists often have direct control over some of the conditions that contribute indirectly to discriminatory assessment. Much control is exhibited when these professionals use techniques which facilitate nondiscriminatory assessment and participate in educating handicapped minority students (Fairchild, 1982). While techniques are available, the extent that they are being used by school psychologists has not been determined. Presently, there is no consensus among professionals concerning which techniques or which combination of techniques works best. The purpose of this research, then, was to determine the extent school psychologists used certain techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment and the level of their participation in formulating educational programs for handicapped minority students.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in this investigation were a sample of full-time school psychologists practicing in various school districts throughout Ohio who were members of the Ohio School Psychologists' Association.

### Procedure

An experimental three-part questionnaire, School Psychologists' Use of Nondiscriminatory Assessment (SPUN), was used in this investigation. The

questionnaire, along with a stamped self-addressed envelope, was mailed to each school psychologists. After a second mailing, a total of 71 questionnaires were returned. Racial composition of the school districts in which the participants worked was 88% White, 11% black, .3% Hispanic, and .7% other including Asian Americans. In the special education programs the racial composition was 87% White, 12% black, and 1% Hispanic.

The first section requested demographic information including race, sex, age, years of experience, educational level, and school setting (i.e., urban, suburban, or rural). Demographic data follow in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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The second section asked participants to specify the frequency ("how often") and degree ("to what extent during evaluation") they used certain techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment. These techniques were selected from literature outlining various procedures (i.e., Duffey, et al, 1981) and, along with descriptions, included (a) culture free tests, (b) culture fair tests, (c) culture specific tests (d) linguistic translations of existing tests, (e) alteration of test administration procedures, (f) Piagetian tasks, (g) pluralistic norms, including SOMPA, (h) criterion-referenced tests, and (i) the learning potential assessment device (LPAD). In addition, participants were allowed to respond if they used a combination of these techniques or other procedures. The frequency scale was a Likert-type format ranging from 1 ("never") to 4 ("very often"). Similarly, the degree scale ranged from 1 ("never") to 4 ("all phases of evaluation").

The third section requested from participants information concerning the extent they were involved in educating handicapped minority students. Items in

this section were selected from literature describing the responsibilities of school psychologists in providing appropriate educational programs for these students (i.e., Council for Exceptional Children, 1978). Participants responded on a scale from 1 ("never") to 4 ("always").

Reliability for the frequency and degree scales and Section Three was estimated using the Coefficient Alpha formula (Cronbach, 1951), which yielded coefficients of .93 for the frequency scale, .95 for the degree scale, and .83 for Section Three. Validity was demonstrated through a significant correlation, $r = .75$, $p < .05$, representing the extent of agreement on the items in Section Two and Three between trainers of school psychologists (i.e., college professors) and practicing school psychologists.

## Results

As shown in Table 2, the participants reported on the frequency scale that they never used most of the techniques described in the questionnaire ($\bar{X} = 1.52$, SD = .75). The most frequently cited were culture specific tests (N = 63, 88.7%), linguistic translations of existing tests (N = 61, 85.9%), the learning potential assessment device (LPAD) (N = 54, 76.1%), Piagetian tasks (N = 47, 66.2%), pluralistic norms, including SOMPA (N = 44, 62.0%), and culture free tests (N = 43, 60.0%. Most often used was criterion-referenced tests (N = 27, 38.0%).

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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Similarly on the degree scale (results shown in Table 3), participants indicated that they never used many of the techniques during various phases of an evaluation ($\bar{X} = 1.52$, SD = .80). In particular, culture specific tests (N = 65, 91.5%), linguistic translations of existing tests (N = 59, 83.1%0, the learning potential assessment device (LPAD) (N = 54, 76.1%), Piagetian tasks (N = 46, 64.8%), pluralistic norms, including SOMPA (N = 46, 64.8%), and culture free tests (N = 45, 63.4%). Similar to their responses on the frequency scale, par-

ticipants indicated that they used criterion-referenced tests during many phases of an evaluation (N = 25, 35.2%).

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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Overall, respondents indicated that they frequently participated in formulating various aspects of educational programs for handicapped minority students ($\bar{X}$ =2.40, SD = 1.09). Aspects of educational programs participants indicated they were never involved included outlining classroom activities which emphasize cultural diversity (N = 38. 53.5%) and identifying educational materials that depict multicultural themes (N = 37, 52.1%). Other results are contained in Table 4.

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Insert Table 4 About Here

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## Discussion

The present findings suggest that public school personnel hoping to provide appropriate education to handicapped minority students might begin with training programs for school psychologists. It is apprent from the results of this investigation that the participants knew little about the techniques referred to in the questionnaire. This is not surprising. Coulopoulos (Note 1) suggested that few school psychologists are trained in the area of nondiscriminatory assessment and, therefore, know little about procedures for evaluating children from minority group backgrounds. These results were verified also by Telzrow (Note 2), especially regarding the use of SOMPA. The participants did indicate that they frequently employed criterion-referenced tests, a procedure for nondiscriminatory assessment often supported in the literature (Oakland, 1980). Although the participants indicated that they were usually involved in educational pro-

gramming, most of their involvement was typical (i.e., developing behavior management plans) and not supplemental to what is provided to handicapped students in general. In addition to discerning most appropriate evaluative methods, training programs must emphasize other skills including the ability to differentiate learning styles of children from minority groups and identify educational activities which emphasize cultural diversity.

The results of this investigation highlight the need to identify and validate educational materials that relate to racial and ethnic themes (Almanza & Mosley, 1980). Historically, only cursory attention has been paid to the development of such teaching tools. Important, too, is teacher sensitivity to the needs of handicapped minority students. Chinn (1979) defined sensitivity as allowing these children to be different and fostering values which help them develop healthy self-concepts.

This research represents a starting point in determining the extent school psychologists use techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment. Skill in the use and, perhaps, development of these techniques, coupled with sound special education techniques, can provide a basic foundation for meeting the needs of handicapped minority students.

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2. Telzrow, C. SOMPA - A review of the system, the criticism, and the data. Unpublished manuscript, no date.

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TABLE 1

Demographic Data

| Characteristics | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| **Sex** | | |
| Male | 24 | 33.8 |
| Female | 47 | 66.2 |
| **Age** | | |
| 21-30 | 19 | 26.8 |
| 31-39 | 31 | 43.7 |
| 40-45 | 4 | 5.6 |
| 46 and above | 17 | 23.9 |
| **Race** | | |
| Black | 2 | 2.8 |
| White | 67 | 94.4 |
| American Indian | 0 | 0.0 |
| Hispanic | 1 | 1.4 |
| Asian American | 1 | 1.4 |
| **Years of Experience** | | |
| 0-4 | 17 | 23.9 |
| 5-8 | 19 | 26.8 |
| 9-12 | 17 | 23.9 |
| 13-16 | 8 | 11.3 |
| 17 or more | 10 | 14.1 |
| **Educational Level** | | |
| Bachelors | 0 | 0.0 |
| Masters | 53 | 74.6 |
| Specialists | 7 | 9.9 |
| Doctorates | 11 | 15.5 |
| **Geographic Region** | | |
| Urban | 23 | 32.4 |
| Suburban | 35 | 49.3 |
| Rural | 13 | 18.3 |

TABLE 2

Numbers and Percentages
Responses to Items on the Frequency Scale

| Items | Never | | Occassionally | | Often | | All the time | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 1. Culture fair tests | 35 | 49.3 | 26 | 36.6 | 7 | 9.9 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 2. Culture free tests | 43 | 60.6 | 21 | 29.6 | 4 | 5.6 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 3. Culture specific tests | 63 | 88.7 | 4 | 5.6 | 1 | 1.4 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 4. Linguistic translations of existing tests | 61 | 85.9 | 8 | 11.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 2.8 |
| 5. Alteration of test Administration procedures | 36 | 50.7 | 28 | 39.4 | 4 | 5.6 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 6. Piagetian tasks | 47 | 66.2 | 20 | 28.2 | 2 | 2.8 | 2 | 2.8 |
| 7. Pluralistic norms, including SOMPA | 44 | 62.0 | 23 | 32.4 | 3 | 4.2 | 1 | 1.4 |
| 8. Criterion-referenced assessment | 13 | 18.3 | 14 | 19.8 | 27 | 38.0 | 17 | 23.9 |
| 9. Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD) | 54 | 76.1 | 10 | 14.1 | 3 | 4.2 | 4 | 5.6 |
| 10. Combination of the above | 55 | 77.5 | 11 | 15.5 | 3 | 4.2 | 2 | 2.8 |
| 11. Other techniques | 63 | 88.7 | 3 | 4.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 7.0 |

* TOTAL N = 71

TABLE 3

Numbers and Percentages of Responses
to Items on the Degree Scale

| Items | Never | | Some Phases Of An Evaluation | | Many Phases Of An Evaluation | | All Phases Of An Evaluation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 1. Culture fair tests | 40 | 56.3 | 20 | 28.2 | 10 | 14.1 | 1 | 1.4 |
| 2. Culture free tests | 45 | 63.4 | 22 | 31.0 | 2 | 2.8 | 2 | 2.8 |
| 3. Culture specific tests | 65 | 91.5 | 1 | 1.4 | 3 | 4.2 | 2 | 2.8 |
| 4. Linguistic translations of existing tests | 59 | 83.1 | 6 | 8.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 8.5 |
| 5. Alteration of test Administration procedures | 37 | 52.1 | 25 | 35.2 | 8 | 11.3 | 1 | 1.4 |
| 6. Piagetian tasks | 46 | 64.8 | 19 | 26.8 | 2 | 2.8 | 4 | 5.6 |
| 7. Pluralistic norms, including SOMPA | 46 | 64.8 | 15 | 21.1 | 5 | 7.0 | 5 | 7.0 |
| 8. Criterion-referenced assessment | 13 | 18.3 | 28 | 39.4 | 25 | 35.2 | 5 | 7.0 |
| 9. Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD) | 54 | 76.1 | 9 | 12.7 | 5 | 7.0 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 10. Combination of the above | 53 | 74.6 | 9 | 12.7 | 5 | 7.0 | 4 | 5.6 |
| 11. Other techniques | 62 | 87.3 | 3 | 4.2 | 1 | 1.4 | 5 | 7.0 |

* TOTAL N = 71

TABLE 4

Numbers and Percentages of Responses
to Items on Extent of Participation
in Educating Handicapped Minority Students

| Items | Never | | Sometimes | | Frequently | | Always | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 1. Helping develop educational programs (IEPS) which take into consideration language and dialect. | 26 | 36.6 | 24 | 33.4 | 10 | 14.1 | 11 | 15.5 |
| 2. Developing behavior management plans. | 11 | 15.5 | 26 | 36.6 | 23 | 32.4 | 11 | 15.5 |
| 3. Outlining classroom activities which emphasize cultural diversity. | 38 | 53.5 | 24 | 33.8 | 6 | 8.5 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 4. Developing activities which enhance positive self-concepts. | 12 | 16.9 | 19 | 26.8 | 24 | 33.8 | 16 | 22.5 |
| 5. Developing activites which foster motivation. | 12 | 16.9 | 19 | 26.8 | 27 | 38.0 | 13 | 18.3 |
| 6. Communicating with parents in a fashion which depicts your cultural awareness. | 10 | 14.1 | 24 | 33.8 | 20 | 28.2 | 17 | 23.9 |
| 7. Identifying educational materials that depict multicultural themes. | 37 | 52.1 | 18 | 25.4 | 13 | 18.3 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 8. Assessing to determine variations in learning styles. | 15 | 21.1 | 18 | 25.4 | 22 | 31.0 | 16 | 22.4 |
| 9. Providing access to a full continum of alternative placements. | 10 | 14.1 | 11 | 15.5 | 17 | 23.9 | 33 | 46.5 |
| 10. Providing opportunities for interaction with nonhandicapped minority and white children. | 20 | 28.2 | 15 | 21.1 | 6 | 8.5 | 30 | 42.3 |
| 11. Outlining provisions against long term placement in self-contained classrooms. | 19 | 26.8 | 19 | 26.8 | 16 | 22.5 | 17 | 23.9 |

TABLE 4
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| Items | Never | | Sometimes | | Frequently | | Always | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 12. Specifying appropriate curricular adaptations in the regular classroom. | 15 | 21.1 | 20 | 28.2 | 22 | 31.0 | 14 | 19.7 |
| 13. Offering consultative services which help teachers foster sensitivity towards handicapped minority students. | 15 | 21.1 | 31 | 43.7 | 14 | 19.7 | 11 | 15.5 |

TOTAL N = 71